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Some Observations on Young Snowy Plover.

BY JNO. M. WILLARD, OAKLAND, CAL.

EARLY on the morning of July 1, 1901, I left Pescadero canyon where I was camping for the summer and with Mr. W. H. Jackson of that place for a companion, drove some seventeen miles down the coast to try to find some breeding Snowy Plovers. Our road ran parallel to the surf, and not far from it, always within hearing or sight,—to within less than two miles of our destination, where it led down onto the beach itself and in some places could only be traveled with safety at high tide. Passing the narrower portions, we were soon on a broad, white beach, with the low bluffs on the one side and with the breakers on the other; and the beautiful white sand, two hundred yards wide, stretching a mile or more ahead of us. Here was the place for Plovers! Our horse did not like the breakers, but we succeeded in persuading him to proceed and in about fifteen minutes turned up into a ravine, half clogged with drift logs etc., that promised a shelter.

After making the horse comfortable we separated and started down the beach. The low bluff, mentioned before, here gave place to gullies and broken stretches of sand, the whole being backed by great dunes of clear drifting sand, unbroken by vegetation for the most part although there were belts and tongues of shrubs, most noticeable among which was *Lupinus arboreus*. These were the homes of numerous *Zonotrichia*. The beach was wide but its inner edge, and in places well into the dune-gullies, was covered with a numerous litter of drift,—the accumulation of years of storms. Among this drift I found five whale-skulls, half buried in the sand.

Before I was five minutes from our buggy I found that a pair of Plovers was circling me like a pair of shadows and uttering a low whistle from time to time. They ran most of the time, but

now and then one would make a short flight. I was looking for a nest when I found what was to me more interesting than a set of eggs could be, a young, not much bigger than my thumb, lying flat on the sand half under a stick of drift wood that was sticking up in the sand. I was not ten feet away from him yet he made no move so I retreated a few steps and sat down on the end of a log to await developments. For fifteen minutes I waited and hardly moved but as far as I could see he had not made any movement whatever. He was laid out perfectly flat, with his chin in front of him, and resting on the sand in a strained and unnatural position. By this time I concluded that he would wait for me to run and get my camera, so, after marking the spot, I started on a run for the wagon to get my instrument back before he accumulated enough courage to get up and run away. The deep sand made running hard, but I got back in five or six minutes to find him exactly as I had left him. His parents were a little nearer than before, but they retreated as I approached. I set up the camera—put my head under the cloth,—and slowly approached to within forty inches, focused it etc.,—and took his picture,—still no movement on his part. Then I wanted another picture and started to move a little closer, when up—my how he did run!

As I shouldered my camera I saw Jackson a couple of hundred yards down the beach waving his arms. He led me back a short distance to a spot marked by an upright stick, and said, "There they are!" But I had to study the ground carefully before I could see the set, so well did their protective coloration blend with the surroundings. Then I saw the set—three fresh eggs, lying with their points together in a slight hollow scooped out of the sand by the Plovers. Circling the eggs was

a dainty wreath of slender bleached bones, chiefly from fishes. The spot chosen for the eggs was about two-hundred yards from the surf, on the level beach sand, near the center of the broad opening of one of the gullies in the sand-dunes. There was no distinguishing mark or object near the eggs, and nothing in the slightest to protect the set from destruction. The Plover was sitting on the nest when it was found and betrayed its presence by gliding off on the close approach of Mr. Jackson. She remained at a distance while we were in the neighborhood, but several hours later while in the vicinity I found a bird sitting on the empty nest. She ran off on our approach.

About twenty-five yards from this set we found two eggs, several feet apart and on an open flat stretch of sand a little nearer the breakers. I concluded that the wind had blown apart the eggs of an incomplete set.

Two more Snowy Plovers were found in this neighborhood, but I was unable to locate their nests or young; but late that afternoon while crossing the sand dunes I stirred up another bird. We had run across a hillock of chips of broken flint, intermixed with shells and a few bones; evidently an Indian mound. While examining this interesting spot I noticed a Plover feigning a broken wing. She would run to within eight or ten yards of me and dropping on one side, would hold the wing of the other up above her back, and crying piteously, would drag herself away. I sat down to await results and after a few minutes she stopped, panting violently, and apparently seriously wounded. Finding that I made no move she tried again and again, until she started within ten feet of me in her endeavor to attract attention and pursuit. But as night was rapidly approaching, and we were twenty miles from camp, I could not stop long enough to work out the object of her solicitude, but for the twenty minutes we were in the neighborhood her efforts to decoy

us were unceasing.

I was especially interested in this incident. Without doubt the bird had either eggs or young in that immediate vicinity; yet that Indian mound was at least a quarter of a mile from the beach—several large hills of drifting sand intervening. Is it the habit of these plovers to nest so far from the surf?

Leaving this anxious bird, we pushed on to the beach, striking it some distance below the buggy. Before we had fairly reached the sands, Jackson called me to his side and pointed to the sand at his feet. There stretched out as if dead but with bright open eyes, lay a plover, even smaller than the first. It had sought no shelter but was trying to conceal its presence by stillness, even on the open sand, for there was no sheltering object near. We approached closer and closer until I could have touched the bird with my hand, but no movement on its part evinced life; so we left it, and were soon on the homeward road.



An Additional Specimen of *Nyctale* From Lake Tahoe.

THE young male mentioned in "Land Birds of the Pacific District" was captured in a dwelling on the evening of Sept. 21, 1899 at Tahoe City, where it may have been reared, as I had been told of small owls that came about the dwelling at night. My second specimen was taken in a dense alder thicket near McKinney's August 23, 1901. It was a young female; I shot it about 10 o'clock in the morning. Its stomach was full of fur and the bones of a small animal.

Possibly both individuals were migrants from the north, but I have long supposed that this owl was a summer resident of the east slope of the Sierras, though I have never heard one and have gone many times to what I thought were favorable parts of the for-